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## The “Double Sense” of Fichte’s Philosophical Language. Some Critical Reflections on the *Cambridge Companion to Fichte*

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## REFERENCES

James, D. & Zöllner, G. (eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to Fichte*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016, 419 pp., ISBN 9780521472265

## 1. Introduction: Fichtean Spirit and Letter

- 1 The example is well-known. Monsieur Jourdain – the main character in Molière’s comedy *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* – has an epiphany: under the tutelage of a master of philosophy he suddenly becomes aware of the nature of his own language:

Monsieur Jourdain: Par ma foi, il y a plus de quarante ans que je dis de la prose, sans que j’en susse rien; et je vous suis le plus obligé du monde, de m’avoir appris cela.  
(By my faith! I have been speaking prose for forty years without being aware of it at all; I am infinitely obliged to you for having taught me that.)<sup>1</sup>

- 2 Although presented as comedy, this example nevertheless highlights an important philosophical point: the difference between merely carrying out acts (here speaking words) and having a conscious understanding of their laws and classification. Johann Gottlieb Fichte philosophically refers to the example of Monsieur Jourdain a number of times in his works, including in the *Zweite Einleitung in die Wissenschaftslehre*.<sup>2</sup> With his writings on the difference between the letter and spirit in philosophy (*Ueber Geist und Buchstabe in der Philosophie*<sup>3</sup>), and his long and complex early 1795 essay on language: *Von der Sprachfähigkeit und dem Ursprung der Sprache*<sup>4</sup>, it would be hard to accuse Fichte of

being a philosopher who was unconscious or indifferent to the nature of his own written and spoken language.

- 3 Indeed, Fichte's struggle for an appropriate philosophical language is often discussed in his main published writings on the *Wissenschaftslehre*. In section §1 of *Über den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre* Fichte claimed that there was a necessary and universal system of philosophical terminology that must be employed in accordance with transcendental concepts, but that it could only be fully and accurately determined after the system had been completed.<sup>5</sup> While in the Preface to the first and principal presentation of his system – the *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* of 1794/95 – Fichte wrote that he had eschewed a fixed or set terminology both in order to stimulate independent cognitive work in his students and to prevent the ossifying of his system. Moreover, he would continue to adhere to this maxim of changing his technical language in all future presentations of his philosophy.<sup>6</sup> As Daniel Breazeale puts it in his article in the *Cambridge Companion to Fichte*:

"It was, in fact, Fichte's deliberate and lifelong policy to adopt a new philosophical vocabulary for virtually every new presentation of his system. His stated reason for doing this was, first of all, to avoid giving comfort to those who might have thought that they could 'master the *Wissenschaftslehre*' merely by memorizing a glossary of technical terms."<sup>7</sup>

- 4 For Fichte, active philosophical thought and spirit had priority over the letter and language, with the latter classified as the outer "designation" (*Bezeichnung*) or "expression" (*Ausdruck*) of the inner cognitive activity: "*Language, in the broadest sense of the word, is the expression of our thought by means of arbitrary signs.*"<sup>8</sup> This is why when trying to understand the *Wissenschaftslehre* it is imperative to move beyond the mere letter of the text.
- 5 However, because Fichte wrote numerous (originally unpublished) versions of his system, certain commentators and readers have assumed that the letter was not important to him. On the contrary, it was of the utmost importance, since the chief reasons behind this multiplicity were to attain ever greater clarity of expression and to present one and the same philosophy from fresh standpoints.<sup>9</sup> In this regard, Fichte wrote in the preface to the second edition of the *Grundlage* that he was thinking of publishing a new written version of the *Wissenschaftslehre*; but if this occurred, the reader would not find any radical departure from the earlier text, but merely "the same content in two very different forms and recognise it to be same again."<sup>10</sup> Nor should one draw the conclusion from the multiple versions of the *Wissenschaftslehre* that the main published text of the *Grundlage* itself was not clear, accurate or understandable enough, or even that it was now obsolete. In Fichte's eyes, the text was still valid and crystal clear: "What has been thought in a perfectly clear manner, is understandable; and I am conscious of having conceived everything in a perfectly clear way."<sup>11</sup>
- 6 Finding the best philosophical expressions were therefore paramount to Fichte, because if upon reading his work one already misunderstands the written letter, it will almost be impossible to move onto its inner spirit. In the fascinating but frequently overlooked small published text from 1800, *Aus einem Privatschreiben*, Fichte elaborated on some of the misunderstandings connected with his choice of philosophical language. He stated that he instinctively chose terms that could convey the living and active intentions of his philosophizing. For example, German words ending with the suffix "*-ung*", such as *Ordnung* or *Wirkung*, were never to be understood statically in his

writings, but *dynamically*, because in his mind they always refer to *activity* – to the *act* of ordering or to the *act* of effecting respectively: "I am so wedded to this way of expressing myself that when I begin to philosophize in the manner that is natural to me no other meaning comes into my thoughts at all".<sup>12</sup>

- 7 What about modern-day readers and scholars of philosophy – to what extent are we similar to Monsieur Jourdain with regard to Fichte's philosophical language? Or do we now have a better grasp of the flexible and dynamic qualities of his vocabulary, how and why Fichte selected certain terms, not to mention the underlying concepts, ideas and acts that his words are meant to express? In the last twenty years, great strides have been made in the scholarship concerning Fichte's philosophical terminology and thoughts on language.<sup>13</sup> Although the newly published *Cambridge Companion to Fichte*, edited by David James and Gunter Zöller, does not have an individual text specifically devoted to Fichte's conception of language and philosophical terms, it nevertheless contains a number of valuable insights directly related to these issues. Emiliano Acosta recently reviewed the *Cambridge Companion to Fichte* for the *Revista de Estud(i)os sobre Fichte*, giving a general overview of it.<sup>14</sup> In the present review-essay I will critically focus on a few specific topics in the volume, particularly the relationship between Fichte's language, thought, and philosophical method.

## 2. What is "Setzen" (Positing)?

- 8 Fichte's term "*setzen*" (posit) is surely one of the most ubiquitous and cited but least understood notions in the whole of his philosophy. Paul Frank's article "Fichte's Position" in the *Cambridge Companion to Fichte* is such an outstanding contribution to the literature on the topic of positing because it explains Fichte's nuanced employment of this term as well as making a convincing case that its origins should be sought for in the Kantian and logical philosophical traditions.<sup>15</sup> Before turning to Paul Frank's interpretation, I will first of all immanently examine Fichte's understanding of *setzen* in his writings.
- 9 What exactly does *setzen* mean for Fichte? In §1 of his central text the *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* of 1794/95, Fichte sets out the aim of his philosophy: to discover the first principle of all human knowledge, one that does not enter into the empirical determinations of consciousness, yet still lies at the basis of it.<sup>16</sup> His argumentation begins by drawing a direct parallel between the certainty of positing in logical thought and the principle of identity before moving onto an analysis of the nature of the judgments carried out by the I (*Ich*).<sup>17</sup> Here "*setzen*" or positing signifies a particular type of philosophical judging and asserting. More exactly, in the opening sections of the *Grundlage* it concerns a rather unique act of theoretical reflection (*Reflexion*) and abstraction (*Abstraktion*). For readers are asked to begin with any fact of empirical consciousness, then to reflect on their own inner thought activity, continually stripping away anything empirical, leading them to a more transparent consciousness of the structure of human cognition.<sup>18</sup> Eventually, the reader learns to determine and posit things *schlechthin* – that is to say, absolutely, or without any further grounds: "one attributes to oneself the capacity to *posit something absolutely*."<sup>19</sup> This will include the activity of one's own I, or an awareness of what Fichte calls "the absolute I". However, the absolute I is not a thing or object, but pure activity: "The absolute I of the first principle is not *something*; (it does not have a predicate, and

cannot have any), it is absolutely, *what* it is, and it cannot be explained any further.”<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, “setzen” in the early sections of the *Grundlage* seems above all to relate to the self-aware, active and absolute form of *thinking* (*denken*) and knowing carried out by the philosophizing I.

- 10 However, if we are to take seriously Fichte’s own specific statements on his use of philosophical language, then any particular sentence or proposition of the *Wissenschaftslehre* can only be fully grasped to the extent that the reader has examined it in its proper context and obtained an understanding of the *Wissenschaftslehre* as a totality: “One explains by means of the context, and one should first acquire an overview of the whole before trying to rigorously determine an individual sentence.”<sup>21</sup> A hallmark of Fichte’s approach in the *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* is that he repeatedly stresses the crucial interdependency between the part and the whole: “I request the future judge of this text to proceed to the whole, and to view every single thought from the vantage point of the whole.”<sup>22</sup>
- 11 In other words, even though Fichte’s use of *setzen* is especially crucial in Part One of the *Grundlage*, we should not neglect to examine the other parts of the text to see what else he might have to say about this concept and term. There we see that in Part Two Fichte does not simply consider *setzen* in connection with *thinking* and logical deductions, but also directly relates it to *anschauen* (intuiting). For example: “The I (*Ich*) posits itself as intuiting, signifies to begin with: it posits itself in the intuition as *active*.”<sup>23</sup> In Fichte’s epistemology the conscious volition activity of the I may be immediately grasped; however, this cannot be done by means of discursive thought or concepts, but it requires the faculty of intuition. In this respect it should not be forgotten that in the preface to the *Grundlage* Fichte maintains that his entire system of philosophy ultimately rests on a free *Tathandlung* or *act* of the I – and this free act must be comprehended by means of the “faculty of inner intuition.”<sup>24</sup> In a later published text Fichte would write that the grounding of his theory of knowledge on the primacy of intuition (*Anschauung*) instead of on concepts is a sign of his attempt to progress beyond Kant’s epistemology.<sup>25</sup>
- 12 Accordingly, I would argue that in the *Grundlage* the term “setzen” is deployed in at least two distinct yet interrelated senses: it essentially signifies both *thinking* and *intuiting*. In the first sense it relates to our theoretical activity, in the second to our practical activity. That the term *setzen* is capable of being deployed in a twofold sense in the *Grundlage* is specifically highlighted by Fichte himself in the text: “In the two sentences that have just been stated there is obviously a double sense (*Doppelsinn*) in the meaning of the word ‘positing’ (*setzen*).”<sup>26</sup> Here Fichte’s underscoring of the “double sense” of *setzen* occurs in the context of a discussion about the passive and active nature of the I, about its real and ideal grounds. In essence, for Fichte, one becomes aware of the ideal ground through the activity of thinking, whereas intuiting is required for a consciousness of the real or practical ground. Moreover, the fact that *setzen* in the *Grundlage* had been employed in a twofold sense in terms of thinking and intuiting, including in relation to the object-nature of the empirical I, is confirmed by Fichte in his 1798 *System of Ethics*. There he writes: “However – a proposition that we can presuppose to be known and proved from a *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* – the I is something only to the extent and degree in which it posits (intuits and thinks) itself as the same, and it is nothing that it does not posit itself to be.”<sup>27</sup>

- 13 The twofold philosophical sense of "positing" in the *Grundlage* is not unknown in the research. In 1996 Claudio Cesa published a seminal essay precisely on Fichte's reference to this double meaning of *setzen*.<sup>28</sup> In his article in the *Cambridge Companion to Fichte*, Paul Franks does not refer to Cesa's seminal text, but it is cited by Christian Klotz in another contribution.<sup>29</sup> Cesa also points to a corresponding example of the double function of the activity of positing in Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*.<sup>30</sup> There the context is on the synthesis of the real and ideal activity of the I, and how it might be possible to unite them in consciousness in an unconditioned or absolute (*schlechthin*) manner: "The proposition, 'the I posits itself', thus has two inseparably linked meanings: an ideal and real meaning, both of which are absolutely united in the I."<sup>31</sup>
- 14 In his illuminating discussion on *setzen* or positing in the *Cambridge Companion to Fichte*, Paul Franks goes greatly beyond much of the earlier research. Although he does not cite Fichte's later reference in the *Grundlage* to the word's "double sense", he arrives at exactly the same conclusion that it should be understood in this manner. Therefore, I can only agree with him when he puts forward the view that Fichte chose this unusual term positing because he needed a single linguistic formulation for capturing this unified notion of the human being. Franks argues that, philosophically speaking, positing is a term which particularly well expresses the theoretical and practical rational activities of the I itself: Fichte "needs a fundamental notion of rational agency as such. Positing is the notion he employs. [...] Furthermore, since Fichte rejects any radical distinction between theoretical reasoning and practical reasoning, positing is an activity that is capable of both theoretical and practical inflections."<sup>32</sup>
- 15 Paul Franks also rightly points to the logical tradition of *ponere* in which *setzen* originally arose, and shows Kant's recourse to it in his early text of 1763: *Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God*. There Kant equates positing with being: "The concept of position or positing is perfectly simple: it is identical with the concept of being in general."<sup>33</sup> Thus, on the topic of philosophical origins too, Paul Franks's article provides a much more detailed and original treatment of the Kantian heritage of positing in Fichte than all previous commentators, convincingly showing among other things how it relates to Kant's reflections on the question of existence, position in space, and the issues relating to the ontological proof of God.<sup>34</sup> However, perhaps there are other fundamental Fichtean links to Kant's text, especially in connection with Fichte's philosophy of religion. For if Fichte's concept of *setzen* or positing is indebted to Kant's treatment of being and absolute positing in the *Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God*, as it definitely seems to be, then a possible avenue of future research that could be worth exploring is how far Fichte's references to absolute positing and the modes of Spinoza's God in the *Grundlage*<sup>35</sup>, are also a transformation or extension of Kant's arguments on absolute positing and Spinoza's God in that same early 1763 text.<sup>36</sup>

### 3. The Significance of Fichte's *Tathandlung*

- 16 It should be clear that with the example of *setzen* or 'positing', readers of Fichte should bear in mind the possibility that his key philosophical terms might have multiple meanings. And of course, even though the terms change in the different versions of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, the central underlying *ideas* and *philosophical doctrines* do not change, but are carried over into subsequent presentations. This important principle is

summarized by Daniel Breazeale in *The Cambridge Companion to Fichte*, when discussing the Fichtean conception of *Anstoß* in the early *Grundlage* and later *nova methodo*: "A similar point might also be made about the differences in technical terminology found in the two presentations. Thus, for example, though the term *Anstoß* or 'check' does not occur in the second presentation, the doctrine itself is retained, though what was previously referred to as a 'check' upon the activity of the I is now called 'a feeling of the I's original limitation or determinacy' [...] The same is true for other key terms: the 'subject/object' of the second presentation, for example, is simply another name for the 'f/act' or *Tathandlung* of the first presentation."<sup>37</sup>

- 17 This leads to the question: apart from *setzen* (positing), what about other key Fichtean terms – do they too have an especially dual meaning or significance? As one can see from Daniel Breazeale's statement above, the free *Tathandlung* or act carried out by the transcendental philosopher relates to the I as both a subject *and* object, or more exactly, as a "subject-object". Like with *setzen*, the word *Tathandlung* also seems to have dual sense, and which is directly evident in the composition of the term itself. It is made up of the two German words *Tat* (deed) and *Handlung* (action). In the *Wissenschaftslehre*, *Tathandlung* relates to the ability of the I as subject to carry out an action in which it becomes its own cognitive object. Fichte repeatedly juxtaposes this inner act with *Tatsachen* – the facts or objects of external being. Again, it is not by chance that Fichte intentionally chose the term *Tatsache* to highlight this juxtaposition, for it is also a composite word formed out of two other words, *Tat* (deed) and *Sachen* (things).
- 18 In the *Cambridge Companion to Fichte* Elizabeth Millán succinctly observes the willed and performative aspect of this move: Fichte's philosophy is a "bold shift from a fact (*Tatsache*) of consciousness to an act of performance (*Tathandlung*) of consciousness uncovering a new starting point for all philosophizing."<sup>38</sup> While in his rich article on "The Dynamic Structure of Consciousness", Christian Klotz also underscores the dual sense of *Tathandlung*: "There are two important aspects that Fichte wants to emphasize with this peculiar terminological move. First, the term expresses the difference between the self-constitutive activity of the I and whatever is a fact (*Tatsache*) of consciousness and thus is grounded by the I's activity. Secondly, the term '*Tathandlung*' also expresses the intrinsic character of this activity: the action in the sense of acting (*Handlung*) immediately brings about its result (*Tat*) ..." <sup>39</sup> However, the word *Tathandlung* is not a neologism created by Fichte, as Christian Klotz mistakenly remarks.<sup>40</sup> That is still a widespread misconception in the research. Paul Franks demonstrated twenty years ago that its origin lies in the two spheres of right and religion. During Fichte's epoch, the term *Tatsache* was the one that was actually the new compound neologism. It had been created by Spalding out of *Tat* and *Sache* and used by him to translate the English word "matters of fact".<sup>41</sup>
- 19 Fully in line with the maxim of repeatedly modifying his terminology, the unique act that Fichte had first called "*Tathandlung*" in 1794, becomes designated in 1804 by the Greek word "Genesis", since the earlier German word had been more difficult to grasp: "The *Wissenschaftslehre* is underpinned by and testifies to an Act (*Tathandlung*), which I have named in these lectures using the Greek word *Genesis*, since the Greek terms are often more easily and correctly understood than the German ones."<sup>42</sup>



## 4. Antitheses: Other Key Fichtean Terms with a "Double Sense"

- 20 As we have seen, Fichte employs his philosophical language in various ways. Firstly, he continually changes his philosophical terms to stimulate the spirit and avoid his system becoming too static. Inversely, Fichte often uses one and the same philosophical term like *setzen* that has a number of different but interrelated meanings. A term may even have more than two meanings. For example, in his study of Fichte's 1795 essay on language Jere Surber shows that *willkürlich* (arbitrary) is utilised in four distinctly different senses.<sup>43</sup> Likewise for Fichte's celebrated notion of *intellektuelle Anschauung* (intellectual intuition). Daniel Breazeale has demonstrated in detail that throughout his writings the single designation 'intellectual intuition' may signify for Fichte at least four different things: i. an intellectual consciousness of freedom and the moral law; ii. "pure I-hood" or identically, a *Tathandlung*; iii. a freely produced 'fact of consciousness'; and iv. the method of genetic construction.<sup>44</sup>
- 21 So it is clearly imperative to examine the context in which any technical term appears in Fichte's writings in order to exactly determine the sense he has given it. Furthermore, a closer analysis of Fichte's own comments on his method of his philosophical language not only reveals that he selected and employed terms with multiple and interrelated meanings, but that like with *setzen*, Fichte specifically uses terms that express a "double sense", in which the two main meanings appear at first sight to be directly opposed or antithetical to each other. Here I will briefly list a number of other Fichtean terms that are employed in this manner and show that this procedure is an intentional and intrinsic aspect of Fichte's philosophical methodology.
- 22 A classic example of this apparently antithetical double sense in a word is Fichte's conception of *Anstoß*. In his article on the *nova methodo* in the *Cambridge Companion to Fichte*, Daniel Breazeale points to the fact that *Anstoß* for Fichte may signify a "summons", i.e. an impetus impelling the I to a fresh and new sphere of activity. However, *Anstoß* is also used by Fichte in virtually the opposite sense, that is to say, as a restriction for the I, blocking or hindering its activity.<sup>45</sup> Elsewhere Breazeale has neatly summarized the almost antithetical "double sense" of *Anstoß* in Fichte's *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*. "[This passage in the *Grundlage*] encapsulates Fichte's case for the necessity of such an *Anstoß* for the very possibility of cognition at the same time that it points to the dual role of the *Anstoß* as both a *limit* and a *stimulus* to the activity of the I."<sup>46</sup>
- 23 Or to take another well-known example. – Fichte scholarship has again long noted that Fichte likewise employs "Bestimmung" in two diametrical senses. In the *Cambridge Companion to Fichte*, Christian Klotz provides an important outline of Fichte's conception of *Wechselbestimmung* (mutual determination): "It is through the opposed directions involved in the mutual determinations of the I and not-I in the dynamical sense that Fichte can introduce – albeit in an initial and rudimentary sense – the distinction between the 'theoretical' and 'practical' aspects of consciousness."<sup>47</sup> However, it is worth remarking that this oppositional nature is even present in the single term *Bestimmung*. On the one hand, Fichte's concept of a *Bestimmung* is that of a "determination", i.e. determining, measuring or defining some kind of object or activity (and here we see further explicit links to *setzen* and *Anstoß*); and on the other hand, it is like a distant ideal, related to one's human vocation. Günter Zöller perfectly



summarizes this duality present in Fichte's 1800 book *Die Bestimmung des Menschen*: "The key word of the work's German title '*Bestimmung*', can mean both 'determination', in the sense of an imposed limitation, and 'calling' or 'vocation', indicating the goal of some pursuit. Fichte's employment of the term in its finitist-finalist double meaning addresses the tension between what is fixed or given in human existence and what is open and yet to be realized about it."<sup>48</sup>

- 24 A third example is Fichte's enigmatic use of the old German word "*Gesicht*" in his Berlin period, a term which literally means "face". In his article "Fichte's Philosophy of Religion" in the *Cambridge Companion to Fichte*, Hansjürgen Verweyen explains how *Gesicht* signifies for Fichte both a philosophical "idea" as well as a "spiritual revelation".

<sup>49</sup> Hence, this too appears to be a striking contradiction. No doubt most other thinkers would thoroughly distinguish between the revelations or visions of a religious mystic and the strictly deducted ideas of a philosopher. Yet in works such as the 1807/08 *Reden an die deutsche Nation* and the 1811/12 *Vorlesungen über die Bestimmung des Gelehrten*, Fichte apparently sees no contradiction, clearly believing that the two senses of *Gesicht* may ultimately be reconciled. In these two late Berlin texts he employs one and the same word *Gesicht* for the visions of the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel on the one hand, and for the scientific ideas of the scholar of the *Wissenschaftslehre* on the other.<sup>50</sup>

- 25 How could these two senses of *Gesicht* be rationally and epistemologically reconciled? One possible path to examine would be to take Fichte's conception of *Anschauen* or intellectual intuiting as a cognitive form of "seeing", and then relate it back to the original Platonic Greek sense of "idea", which as we saw is explicitly translated into German by Fichte as *Gesicht*. In the domain of his philosophy of religion, Fichte designated Plato as one of the philosophical forerunners to the *Wissenschaftslehre*.<sup>51</sup> Günter Zöller remarks in his article "Fichte's Later Presentations of the *Wissenschaftslehre*" on Fichte's *Bildlehre*, or theory of the image, are highly appropriate in this regard: "Fichte's imagist understanding of knowledge further strengthens the linkage of his thought to Plato, whose key concept of Form (or Idea) is etymologically derived from the Greek word for 'seeing'. Like Plato, Fichte tends to cast his conception of knowledge in visual terms by assimilating knowledge to seeing and by designating the instantaneous obtaining of knowledge as 'intuition' and 'insight'."<sup>52</sup>

## 5. Conclusion: Language in the Light of the Synthetic Method

- 26 In the Preface to the *Grundlage* Fichte states: "I especially consider it necessary to recall that I will not say everything, but I will also leave some things for my readers to think about."<sup>53</sup> Looked at in isolation, Fichte's employment of the above-mentioned main terms of *setzen*, *Tathandlung*, *Bestimmung*, *Anstoß* and *Gesicht* may appear unusual, and perhaps not particularly methodical. It is only when we consider them as a totality that a pattern and systematicity starts to arise. Could Fichte have intentionally and systematically used terms with almost antithetical senses – where it is left to the reader to carefully examine the context, and to actively try and overcome their apparent contradictions? It appears so, especially if we view Fichte's linguistic method as an integral part of his general *synthetic* method of philosophy, and not divorced from it, as is so often the case.

- 27 Fichte's synthetic method involves the positing of opposed elements and then undertaking a process which involves trying to overcome the antitheses. This process involves the power of the imagination, which in Fichte's system assists the I in uniting the apparently contradictory elements. Fichte's philosophical method is often known by the triad of "thesis-antithesis-synthesis", as Christian Klotz explains in his contribution.<sup>54</sup> Klotz is also one of the few contributors in the *Cambridge Companion to Fichte* to highlight the crucial reconciling function that the power of the imagination plays in the *Wissenschaftslehre*.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, Daniel Breazeale's article also provides an overview of Fichte's various methodical approaches in his Jena period. Breazeale notes how Fichte's method in the *Grundlage* specifically relates to what we have said above concerning the activity of *setzen* and the other key Fichtean notions and terms. It is a procedure of trying to reconcile the conflicts between the real and ideal activities of the I: "The *Foundation* begins with a posited contradiction between the I and the not-I and then proceeds 'inward', as it were, first redefining the conflict between the 'directions' of the I's activities or between the 'real' and 'ideal' activities of the I, and finally locating it within the necessary internal structure of I-hood itself."<sup>56</sup>
- 28 At the non-empirical and transcendental standpoint, the task of the philosopher is to unite these opposed elements at a higher level by means of a *synthesis*. To do this properly, however, the philosopher must not neglect to freely engage their power of imagination. For it is the latter power which allows the philosopher to hover between the two extremes of the finite and the infinite, the ideal and the real, the theoretical and practical, and then to commence the process of overcoming any apparent philosophical contradiction. – And not only that: it is precisely the power of the imagination that furthermore permits the student and reader of Fichte to pass from the fixed outer letter to the dynamic inner philosophical spirit or ideas of his system. As Fichte writes in the *Grundlage*:

"The *Wissenschaftslehre* is of such a kind that it cannot at all be communicated by the mere letter, but solely by the spirit. This is because in anyone who studies it, its foundational ideas have to be generated by the creative power of the imagination itself."<sup>57</sup>

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## NOTES

1. J.B.P. Molière, *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* (Paris, 1671), pp. 28-29. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations in the present review-essay are my own.
2. See J.G. Fichte, *Zweite Einleitung in die Wissenschaftslehre* (*Gesamtausgabe*: GA I/4: 237). English translation: "Second Introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre*", in: J.G. Fichte, *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), p. 79.
3. J.G. Fichte, *Ueber Geist und Buchstab in der Philosophie* (GA I/6: 333-361).
4. J.G. Fichte, *Von der Sprachfähigkeit und dem Ursprung der Sprache* (GA I/3: 97-127). English translation: "On the Linguistic Capacity and the Origin of Language", in: Jere Paul Surber,

*Language and German Idealism: Fichte's Linguistic Philosophy* (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press International, 1996), pp. 119-144.

5. See J.G. Fichte, *Über den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre*, 2nd edition 1798 (GA I/2: 118, footnote). English translation: *Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre* in: J.G. Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 106.

6. Cf. J.G. Fichte, *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2: 252).

7. Daniel Breazeale, "The *Wissenschaftslehre* of 1796-99 (*nova methodo*)", in: *The Cambridge Companion to Fichte*, p. 123.

8. "Sprache, im weitesten Sinne des Wortes, ist der Ausdruck unserer Gedanken durch willkürliche Zeichen." J.G. Fichte, *Von der Sprachfähigkeit und dem Ursprung der Sprache* (GA I/3: 97; SW VIII: 302). English translation: "On the Linguistic Capacity and the Origin of Language", in: Jere Paul Surber, *Language and German Idealism: Fichte's Linguistic Philosophy*, p. 120.

9. "Vorbericht" (Preface to the second edition) 1801, J.G. Fichte, *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2: 461; SW I: 85). (ibid.).

10. "denselben Inhalt in zwei sehr verschiedenen Formen zu finden, und als denselben wieder zu erkennen" J.G. Fichte, *Grundlage*, ibid.

11. "Vorrede" (Preface to the first edition) 1795, J.G. Fichte, *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2: 253; SW I: 88). Concerning the validity of the *Grundlage* text, see the "Vorbericht" (Preface to the second edition) 1801 (GA I/2: 461; SW I: 85).

12. J.G. Fichte, *Aus einem Privatschreiben* (GA I/6: 374). English translation: *From a Private Letter*, in: J.G. Fichte, *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), p. 16 (slightly modified).

13. Concerning the topic of Fichte's theory of language and philosophical terminology, see, among others: Jere Paul Surber, *Language and German Idealism: Fichte's Linguistic Philosophy* (1996); Dominik Schmidig, "Sprachliche Vermittlung philosophischer Einsichten nach Fichtes Frühphilosophie", *Fichte-Studien* 10 (1997): 1-15; Thomas Sören Hoffmann, "Die Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre und das Problem der Sprache bei Fichte", *Fichte-Studien* 10 (1997): 17-33; Damir Barbaric, "Fichtes Gedanken vom Wesen der Sprache", *Fichte-Studien* 19 (2002): 213-222; and Augustin Dumont: "Qu'est-ce que dire 'je suis'? Étude sur la question du langage chez Fichte", *Les Études philosophiques* 2013 (2): 179-199.

14. See issue 13 (2017): Verano/Verão 2016.

15. See Paul Franks, "Fichte's Position: Anti-Subjectivism, Self-Awareness and Self-Location in the Space of Reasons" in: *The Cambridge Companion to Fichte*, pp. 374-404.

16. Cf. "Wir haben den absolut ersten, schlechthin unbedingten Grundsatz alles menschlichen Wissens aufzusuchen." J.G. Fichte, *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2: 255; SW I: 91).

17. "Man setzt durch die Behauptung, dass obiger Satz (A ist A) an sich gewiss sey." Fichte, *Grundlage* (GA I/2: 256; SW I: 93).

18. Cf. J.G. Fichte, *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2: 255).

19. "schreibt man sich das Vermögen zu, etwas schlechthin zu setzen." J.G. Fichte, *Grundlage* (GA I/2: 256; SW I: 93).

20. "Das absolute Ich des ersten Grundsatzes ist nicht etwas; (es hat kein Prädikat, und kann keins haben), es ist schlechthin, was es ist, und dies lässt sich nicht weiter erklären." J.G. Fichte, *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2: 271).

21. "Man wird aus dem Zusammenhange erklären, und sich erst eine Übersicht des Ganzen verschaffen müssen, ehe man sich einen einzelnen Satz scharf bestimmt." J.G. Fichte, *Grundlage* (GA I/2: 252; SW I: 87).
22. "Die künftigen Beurtheiler dieser Schrift ersuche ich auf das Ganze einzugehen, und jeden einzelnen Gedanken aus dem Gesichtspunkte des Ganzen anzusehen." J.G. Fichte, *Grundlage* (GA I/2: 253; SW I: 89).
23. "Das Ich setzt sich, als anschauend, heißt zuförderst: es setzt in der Anschauung sich als *thätig*." J.G. Fichte, *Grundlage* (GA I/2: 371; SW I: 229).
24. "... dass sie das Vermögen der Freiheit der inneren Anschauung voraussetzt." J.G. Fichte, *Grundlage* (GA I/2: 253; SW I: 88).
25. See J.G. Fichte, "[Ankündigung:] Seit sechs Jahren", 1800/1801 (GA I/7: 155-156); English translation: "Announcement" in: J.G. Fichte/F.W.J. Schelling, *The Philosophical Rupture between Fichte and Schelling, Selected Texts and Correspondence (1800-1802)*, eds. and trans. Michael G. Vater and David W. Wood (Albany/N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2012), pp. 87-88.
26. "In den beyden so eben aufgestellten Sätzen liegt offenbar ein Doppelsinn in der Bedeutung des Wortes *Setzen*." J.G. Fichte, *Grundlage* (GA I/2: 325; SW I: 173).
27. "Aber – ein Satz, den wir aus einer Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre als bekannt und erwiesen voraussetzen könnten – das *Ich* ist etwas nur insofern, inwiefern es sich selbst als dasselbe setzt (anschaut und denkt) und es ist nichts, als was es sich nicht setzt." J.G. Fichte, *Das System der Sittenlehre*, 1798 (GA I/5: 46). Cf. the English translation: Fichte, *The System of Ethics*, eds. and trans. Daniel Breazeale and Günter Zöller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 34.
28. See Claudio Cesa, "'... ein Doppelsinn in der Bedeutung des Wortes *Setzen*'" in: *Der Grundansatz der ersten Wissenschaftslehre Fichtes. Der Stand der Fichte-Forschung*, eds. Erich Fuchs, Ives Radrizzani (Neuried: ars una, 1996), pp. 134-144.
29. See Christian Klotz, "Fichte's Explanation of the Dynamic Structure of Consciousness in the 1794-95 Wissenschaftslehre", in: *The Cambridge Companion to Fichte*, endnote 7, p. 88.
30. Claudio Cesa, "'... ein Doppelsinn in der Bedeutung des Wortes *Setzen*'", p. 141.
31. "Der Satz: das Ich setzt sich selbst, hat 2 unzertrennliche Bedeutungen, eine ideale und reale, welche beide in dem Ich schlechthin vereinigt sind." J.G. Fichte, *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* (GA IV 2: 46); English in: J.G. Fichte, *Foundations of Transcendental Philosophy (Wissenschaftslehre) nova methodo (1796/99)*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 145 (translation slightly modified).
32. Paul Franks, "Fichte's Position: Anti-Subjectivism, Self-Awareness and Self-Location in the Space of Reasons" in: *The Cambridge Companion to Fichte*, p. 382.
33. "Der Begriff der Position oder Setzung ist völlig einfach und mit dem von Sein überhaupt einerlei." I. Kant, *Der einzig mögliche Beweisgrund zu einer Demonstration des Daseins Gottes* (AA 2: 73); English translation: *Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God*, in: I. Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, eds. David Walford and Ralf Meerbote (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 119 (translation slightly modified).
34. See Paul Franks, "Fichte's Position: Anti-Subjectivism, Self-Awareness and Self-Location in the Space of Reasons" in: *The Cambridge Companion to Fichte*, especially pp. 378-380.
35. E.g. see J.G. Fichte, *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2: 263; SW I: 100-101).
36. On Spinoza, see I. Kant, *Der einzig mögliche Beweisgrund zu einer Demonstration des Daseins Gottes* (AA 2: 74); English translation: *Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God*, in: I. Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, p. 119.
37. Daniel Breazeale, "The *Wissenschaftslehre* of 1796-99 (*nova methodo*)", in: *The Cambridge Companion to Fichte*, p. 123.

38. Elizabeth Millán, "Fichte and the Development of Early German Romantic Philosophy" in: *The Cambridge Companion to Fichte*, p. 308.
39. Christian Klotz, "Fichte's Explanation of the Dynamic Structure of Consciousness in the 1794-95 *Wissenschaftslehre*", in: *The Cambridge Companion to Fichte*, p. 70.
40. Ibid.
41. See Paul Franks, "Freedom, *Tatsache* and *Tathandlung* in the Development of Fichte's Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*" *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 79/3 (1997): 310-323.
42. J. G. Fichte, *Wissenschaftslehre* 1804 (2) (GA II/8: 202). Cf. the English translation: *The Science of Knowing. J.G. Fichte's 1804 Lectures on the Wissenschaftslehre*, ed. and trans. Walter E. Wright (Albany/ N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2005), p. 106.
43. See Jere Paul Surber, *Language and German Idealism: Fichte's Linguistic Philosophy* (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press International, 1996), pp. 34-44.
44. "Intellectual Intuition", a chapter in: Daniel Breazeale, *Thinking through the Wissenschaftslehre: Themes from Fichte's Early Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 197-229.
45. See Daniel Breazeale, "The *Wissenschaftslehre* of 1796-99 (*nova methodo*)", in: *The Cambridge Companion to Fichte*, pp. 120-123.
46. Daniel Breazeale, *Thinking through the Wissenschaftslehre: Themes from Fichte's Early Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 162.
47. See Christian Klotz, "Fichte's Explanation of the Dynamic Structure of Consciousness in the 1794-95 *Wissenschaftslehre*", in: *The Cambridge Companion to Fichte*, endnote 7, p. 88.
48. Günter Zöllner, *Fichte's Transcendental Philosophy: The Original Duplicity of Intelligence and Will* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 1.
49. See Hansjürgen Verweyen, "Fichte's Philosophy of Religion" in: *The Cambridge Companion to Fichte*, p. 297.
50. See J. G. Fichte, *Reden an die deutsche Nation* (GA I/10: 141, 148, 208-209) and J.G. Fichte, *Vorlesungen über die Bestimmung des Gelehrten* (GA I/10: 384-399). For a valuable discussion of Fichte's use of *Gesicht*, see: Marco Rampazzo Bazzan: "Idee und Gesicht in den Fünf Vorlesungen über die Bestimmung des Gelehrten (1811)", *Fichte-Studien* 32 (2009): 25-36.
51. See J.G. Fichte, *Die Anweisung zum seligen Leben, oder auch die Religionslehre*, 1806 (GA I/9: 73, 110).
52. Günter Zöllner, "Fichte's Later Presentations of the *Wissenschaftslehre*" in: *The Cambridge Companion to Fichte*, pp. 150-151.
53. "Besonders halte ich für nöthig zu erinnern, dass ich nicht alles sagen, sondern meinem Leser auch etwas zum Denken überlassen wollte." J.G. Fichte, *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2: 253).
54. See Christian Klotz, "Fichte's Explanation of the Dynamic Structure of Consciousness in the 1794-95 *Wissenschaftslehre*", in: *The Cambridge Companion to Fichte*, pp. 72-73.
55. Ibid. pp. 79-81.
56. Daniel Breazeale, "The *Wissenschaftslehre* of 1796-99 (*nova methodo*)", in: *The Cambridge Companion to Fichte*, p. 122.
57. "Die Wissenschaftslehre ist von der Art, dass sie durch den blossen Buchstaben gar nicht, sondern dass sie lediglich durch den Geist sich mittheilen lässt; weil ihre Grundideen in jedem, der sie studirt, durch die schaffende Einbildungskraft selbst hervorgebracht werden müssen;" J.G. Fichte, *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (GA I/2: 415; SW I: 284).